

# THE ISCARIOT

EDEN PHILLPOTTS





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BY EDEN PHILLPOTTS

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY  
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LONDON  
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1912

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## THE ISCARIOT

*(In a great chamber sits the Sanhedrin about Caiaphas. To the west, between open pillars, a setting moon shines above the flat roofs of Jerusalem. Dawn has touched the east. Distant torch-light flashes fitfully and the air is tremulous with the murmur of a troubled city. Judas walks up and down before the priests and elders. Upon the paven floor lie pieces of silver scattered, some of which are illuminated by the moon and shine white, while others, reflecting the radiance of swinging lamps, glitter as though they were made of gold.)*

**G**IVE heed to me, ye Guardians of the  
Law ;

Hear one cast out, already on the brink  
Of the dark river. Now in patience learn  
The truth of this same Jesus I have sold,  
But not for thirty pieces—for a dream !  
Aye, listen well ; my blood's a phlegethon ;  
My bosom bursts with this accursèd sleight  
Played by the fiends of Tophet. Gone—all  
gone !

Scattered and sped and vanished, like the veil  
 That golden mists of morning weave and wind  
 About a mountain's forehead, till the sun,  
 Grown thirsty, drinks the nightly dew and  
       burns

The blessed shade away.

Conceive my dream :

Empire it was, and glory, and the reign  
 Of Heaven unfolded here ; our citadel—  
 Our holy Zion—raised to top the world ;  
 The promise ratified ; the dynasty  
 Of God and David's Son enthronèd high  
 Within Judea's sacred heart, to send  
 Sweet dayspring and deliverance and joy  
 Through earth's far bourne !

Ye priests, it was for that—  
 For that I laboured and for that I lived ;  
 And ere yon lesser light, now gliding down  
 Upon the starry purple, shall be gone,  
 I thought that grey Gethsemane must see  
 Jehovah crown His Son ! For thus it  
       stands

Under the signet of the Faithful One :

We are the crest and corner-stone of man,  
And hold earth's everlasting destiny  
By the Eternal Will in our sole hand.  
To us the mastery of the world is given ;  
We only, the unchanging, steadfast rock  
In this mad sea of change, endure and  
stand,

Unbowed, unbroken, and discriminate  
Till Time is told. Our Race alone of all  
Shall ride upon the welter of the  
world—

This seething ocean of unnumbered men  
Poured like a deluge forth from Hellas,  
Rome,

Gaul, and Armenia, from the misty North  
And Egypt's sandy heart. The Chosen we,  
And from our sacred and predestined root  
The Son of God must bloom. If otherwise  
The Eternal breaks His Covenant with  
man—

A blasphemy to whisper. 'Tis for Christ—  
For Christ we keep our blood a fountain  
pure ;

For Christ we walk unspotted as a maid  
That waits her promised spouse.

Who better know  
Than ye, how fainting earth Messiah craves?  
Who better know the faltering, the grief,  
The dwindling hope, the ever-waxing fear?  
Pagans are thundering at our Temple gates  
And at our hearts; all expectation droops  
And noblest spirits sicken with the dearth  
Of these sad, twilight days. Deep from their  
tombs

The prophets of the promises, attent,  
Still listen, sleeping not until the truth  
Whispered by God, through God shall come  
full round

Unto fulfilment. Yet Judea's ear,  
That strains for the first trumpet from on  
high,

Gleans nothing but the roar of Roman  
wheels

And clang of mail, where the deep valley  
dust

Spews forth another legion; still her eyes—

Her patient eyes, uplifted to the hills—  
See nought but gathering eagles, that would  
    fain  
Play vulture with her corse.

O Palestine!

Thy zealous child was Judas till this morn,  
And love of thee, and hope, and utmost  
    faith

In thine eternal heritage from Heaven,  
Have slain him now. Yet can a myth so  
    weigh

That men of might are called to perish  
    for it?

List then, how, yearning for Messiah's Hour,  
I met Him, as I dreamed—the Son of God—  
Moving amid His own, who knew Him not.

To me came Jesus, and I marvelled much  
How a poor preacher of the hedge and  
    ditch

Should dare to challenge reason. "Friend,"  
    said I,

For I had heard the seer tell his tale,

“Now hail thee, ‘King of Beggars,’ not of  
men!

Go, stir the antres of the wilderness  
For starving, wolfish things that cry to  
herd

And hunt their betters; promise ample prey  
To vermin and the pariahs of earth—  
The living dust that rises in a storm  
To choke clean throats and nostrils. Foolish  
man!

Equality thou preachest in God’s Name,  
Who made all things unequal; thou wouldst  
set

That futile, deadly lance in every hand—  
To wound itself withal. And what of these?  
Dost think this fœtid rout of draggle-tails  
And dropsies and lopped limbs and palsied  
legs

Doth march to take a kingdom?

“True, thou say’st

Thy kingdom is not founded upon earth.  
Then shall this cankered trash ascend to  
Heaven,



Where kings do service and the prophets  
kneel

Before the Throne of God? What pledge  
hast thou,

Wild shepherd of the goats, that shall  
affirm

Thy fold's security? The robber folk—

Those nomad leaders, who draw men away,

And sharpen secret swords on desert stones

To carve up our tame cities presently—

Their purpose one doth comprehend, but  
thine——?

What head shalt thou make? Who shall fear  
thine hordes?

What sure salvation may this crippled band

Of all incompetencies win from thee?

Lead them direct, if thou wouldst be their  
friend,

Down to the silent sanctuaries of death,

Where none shall suffer at them. It is  
there

Their heritage doth lie. In mercy point

The shortest road and bid them follow it,

That earth may sweeter be by their surcease.  
Their malady is weakness—a supreme  
And potent poison in the world's affairs,  
That, like some foul but ever-flowing tide,  
Creeps up the rock of power and lifts and  
lifts

To drown the lonely strong. This rodent  
plague

Judea frets, and now, most sorely struck .  
By the fierce hectic of that fever fell,  
She faints beneath the mastership of Rome.  
Ye teach the weak to hate and not to trust ;  
Ye cry that strength is sin and might a  
vice

In sight of the Almighty! Erring friend,  
If weakness be the highest good on earth,  
Then let the highest weakness rule the earth,  
And yonder crooked fragment of a man,  
Half eaten by the leprosy, that drags  
His trunk with handless arms along the  
dust,

Be lifted to the throne, or take the field  
Against our myriad foes!"

But Jesus bore  
With all the withering scorn I poured about  
His ragged faction. Gently thus he spake :  
“ Upon the weakest link depends the chain  
That draws to Heaven. All mankind in  
truth

May win thereto, but yet is it decreed  
That these sore-stricken, wounded companies  
Of unloved and unprofitable people  
Inherit first ; for if they be not heirs  
Of their Eternal Father’s home, then none  
Is heir and He shall all forget. But know  
The Everlasting One appraiseth not  
Man at man’s value. On a golden scale  
God measures, and the weight thereof is  
love.

Oh ! subtle, subtle is the love of God—  
A fire that eats the green and spares the  
dry ;

A wind that blows away the heavy grain  
From earthly threshing-floors, and leaves the  
chaff

For heavenly garner. ’Tis a force beyond

All wit of man to mete, or dimly know,  
Or watch i' the working; therefore be assured  
That many a mighty one ye hold and  
hug

And deem august and call the salt of earth,  
Shall prove but dust of Heaven—less, far  
less

Than these poor, hunger-bitten, frantic things,  
Led by the first faint hope their souls have  
known,

That crawl to make my pomp." Further he  
spake—

Ye know the matter of his charge and plea,  
Since often, in your darkness, ye have cursed  
To mark the message echoed high and low.  
But me he tented deep: his rede was new,  
Yet pregnant, and it touched me to the  
quick

Of my soul's life; for long had I believed  
That good and evil in the ways of man  
Were ravelled up and knotted and entwined  
Beyond all resolution; sure was I  
That in the alembic of the human heart

Old rights and wrongs were melted into  
one ;

That evil leavened good, that good itself,  
Since the Mosaic legacy was spent,  
Had grown of grim complexion ; and I saw  
How values after measurement of man  
Were vain and void.

He said that he was God,  
And reason fell upon its knees to hear,  
For he believed himself ! There was in  
him

Living assurance and the power to win  
A cold and doubting spirit with a phrase.  
He said that he was God, and I believed,  
Wrested thereto by shock of wakened love  
And pride in friendship ; for until he came  
Before the portals of this lonely heart  
And sought to enter, all my life austere  
Had driven men away, where beacons burned  
That promised warmer welcome. Thus it  
fell

That I accepted from my pent-up heart  
Fully and perfectly with hungry joy ;

For when such secret souls as mine once  
love,

The torrent bursts all bounds and pours  
itself

In a raging flood. And as I haunted him,  
To hear the evangel, luminous and pure,  
Of his most glorious hope, I felt in truth  
The Ancient of the Ages had sent forth  
His very Son to earth, and willed that He  
Should walk unseen till now. For this man  
lived

With such a life as never had I seen  
In all the paths of men; a bloom of being  
Shone like the Springtime from his radiant  
soul.

He gave his life as others fling away  
Their riches—gave and gave and gave again.  
Like the sweet music of the psaltery,  
That wearies never while the fingers pluck,  
Even so he, while men had ears to hear,  
Sang a new music to humanity.  
He held a light; he spake a wondrous  
word,

And Mercy was its name: gentle indeed,  
Yet terrible. A boon and benison  
To all forgotten, fruitless, weary souls  
And the sad staple of our human kind;  
A death eternal to the order old,  
That sank within the still and marble past  
Entombed by him.

‘The poor in spirit blessed!’

Lo, what a challenge, what an anthem  
new,

Dropped like a singing star from highest  
Heaven,

Was there of revolution! So he came,  
From David’s seed to make the peace with  
God:

Rainbow of Promise on the thunder-cloud  
Of our primordial fall and dreadful fate—  
The Christ indeed!

“Oh, let one joyful shout  
From all the wide-winged seraphim in  
Heaven,

Proclaim Thee now the Master of this  
world!”

Thus cried my awakened soul—I gave up all  
And followed him, and left him nevermore.  
My hard-won learning into night I cast  
Before this dawn of everlasting truth,  
Emptied my brain and scoured away my lore,  
As I had cleansed a vessel that was foul ;  
I scorned my body, elbowed the unclean,  
Suffered the heat and hunger, shared my  
    goods,  
And held our pitiful purse ; all I forgot  
And put behind me, since it was his will,  
Thus sacrificing reason to the faith  
That he was come to feed the starving earth.

ABOVE all else that drew me to him first  
There rang a mighty manifest of truth :  
That Heaven's whole kingdom lay within the  
    heart !  
As corn doth wait the coming of the rain  
To spread a vernal veil upon the earth,  
Even so rich and heavenly a harvest-field  
Each man may make of his poor, barren  
    self,



Given the grain from God! For that alone—  
That echo of a golden verity  
Reverberating to despondent souls—  
I would have followed Jesus.

Close I kept,  
But not submerged within the gathering host  
That moved about his way. Far otherwise—  
'Twas my swift ear that ever truest heard;  
'Twas I that of the twelve—his chosen  
ones—

Grew drunk upon the cup he offered us.  
To no high issues were the rest ordained;  
The draught he daily poured fired not at all  
Their simple minds: as dew-drop from the  
reed,  
His secret 'scaped them. Like a flock of  
sheep

They grazed along behind the shepherd's  
heels,  
Content to follow where he chose to go,  
To ask for nothing but their daily meed,  
And bleat a little when the way was  
steep.

But, through the chambers of my swifter  
brain,

The force ineffable and secret fire  
Of all he taught us leapt and burned apace.  
In frenzy of anticipation fierce

I saw the promised conquest of this  
world,

That first should come ; I ate my spirit out,  
While still he tarried, caring not that time  
Sped on, and that Judea's lowly couch  
Was wet with tears.

Then, what he would not tell,  
I strove to win by ambushes of words  
And questions deeply masked. Through starry  
nights,

When far afield amid the desert wilds,  
Or by the margin of the inland sea,  
Way-worn and weary, he would lay him  
down

To sleep on any pillow with the twelve,  
I pressed him close, revealed my loftier  
thoughts

And wider sympathies. I showed to him

How far unlike the fishermen was I ;  
How swift of mind and subtle ; how I saw,  
Out of the human love I bore to him,  
The goal whereto he travelled, and the  
way !

I spoke of mighty dead who knew not  
God,  
Yet whom God knew, and breathed upon and  
showed

The fore-glow whose true dawn would blaze  
anon

To light His Chosen. Yea, I told the tale  
Of Athens and the wondrous sons she bare  
To the true God, while yet unnumbered false  
Tore at the people's hearts with human  
hands.

For human were they—men and women all—  
Wrought by the seers of that olden time  
To be a boon for them who cried for  
gods.

Living and breathing visions from the void,  
They came in sunny splendour to the folk,  
And all the people lived beside their gods

As learned magi and the sages live  
Beside their symbols. But mock deities  
Possess no power to make their servants  
men,

Such as are we ; though cunning artists came,  
Juggled with marble, ivory, and gold,  
And raised a very galaxy of gods  
On high for devilish idolatry  
Within a thousand temples. Now the doom  
Of the one God we worship falls, and  
night

Eternal soon shall gulf that lingering brood  
Of gods inferior to Fate—poor ghosts—  
Less than their Themis—Jove's assessor dire.  
Anon, I named in his unlisting ear  
That master-spirit—he who steadfast shone  
Like a sure pharos on the broken waves  
And ebb and flow of thought ; to show the  
rocks

That filled those stormy channels, ere our  
God

The charted way for evermore revealed.  
But nought he cared for Socrates, until

I named the hemlock cup, and then, indeed,  
All vague and drowsy at the brink of  
sleep,

Declared that earth must ever stone and  
slay

Her prophets. So he fell on slumber deep,  
As one, who having poured his life all day  
For others' need, must seek the founts of  
rest

And deeply draw against to-morrow's toll.

But I slept not : my mind, on pinions swift  
Won from his word, now traversed life and  
time ;

Dwelt with the rising and the setting stars ;  
Leapt the black hills with day to ravish  
night ;

Brooded upon our destiny, and strove  
How to unwind the purpose of the present  
With all its sordid ugliness and want.  
Whence this sad waste, these temporal  
miseries

Of meagre food, cold welcome, chill response  
Unto the tidings ? Wherefore did he choose

So arid, profitless, and thorny a path  
To David's empty throne? And for how  
long

Would he remain content to wear the dress  
Of muddy man, while from his eyes there  
glowed

The fire divine? Now in a gentle beam  
Of most benignant light 'twas wont to  
shine ;

Now, like the awful, azure tongue of levin  
From heart of storm, it flashed the ire of  
God ;

And whether 'twas a smile he downward  
cast,

Gentle and lambent on the little ones  
Who struggled to be throned upon his knee,  
Or 'gainst yourselves a knotted brow he  
bent

To shrivel up your broad phylacteries—  
Whether in joy or sorrow, peace or pain,  
Those eyes declared him, born out of the  
blue

Of sea and sky and mountain-purple dim

All men have seen, none trodden. There I  
drank,

And something of the deeper mystery won  
That he denied his lips.

Nay, move ye not!

Harken, ye frozen ones, some season yet  
To this confusion of a frustrate soul.

He said that he was God, and I believed,  
And cast about to help the world believe.

HAVE ye not seen at Sidon, when a ship,  
New launched upon the haven's peace, doth  
put

To sea, how first the aid of little boats  
The virgin vessel craves? Such lesser craft  
Bring forth the argosy when she doth bid  
Farewell to earth. It is their humble part  
To draw her stately from the circling arms  
Of the land-mother, where her shape was  
built—

In the far forest first, and then by man  
Beside her future home and destiny.  
So slowly forth she comes unto the sea,

To feel the wind upon her sails' deep bosom  
And the wide wave, that laughs and shows  
its teeth

Smote by her virgin stem. And thus her  
course

She takes and weds the fickle main, nor  
knows

How long his love will last. In maiden  
trust

She bows to the great deep and yields herself  
Into his keeping, with companionship  
Of willing winds and waves and leaping  
foam.

Music doth mark her going, where the ropes  
Sing to the harper with the unseen hand ;  
A sudden splendour of pure golden light  
Burns on her opening wings, and from the  
sun

To the least human eye upon the shore,  
All mark her hopeful course and joyful  
might,

Taking good heart and happiness to see  
The pride of Sidon sweep upon her way.



The little ships creep back. They are forgot ;  
Yet to good purpose have they played their part,  
And justified themselves. Consider then  
That even such a little ship was I—  
Judas, that speak to ye.

Now grew a hope,  
A hope that swelled into a fierce resolve,  
To draw my master from this coward peace  
And launch him swift on his immortal  
voyage.

Oh ! see ye not, even ye who hated him,  
His majesty of purpose ? Granted all  
Was but a gorgeous dream, by dreams men  
guess

At the heart of the dreamer ; for your  
slumbering mind,

Albeit free from earth's material grip  
And desolating fetters of the real,  
Still bears the sleepers' stamp. No evil man  
Hath noble visions, and no lofty soul,  
Though it be foundered in the fens of sleep,  
Is moved to dream of baseness. Bear in  
mind

He is a Galilean—men who dream  
By nature, and their visions oft translate  
Into the stuff of warlike, waking life.  
His heart to yours is as the living bud  
To the dead leaf beside it on the bough.  
Remember, priests, that he believed himself—  
Yea, he believed himself; and was it strange  
That, seeing men and what men seek and  
shun,  
And measuring the gulf that yawned betwixt  
His own sad soul and theirs, this Nazarene  
Should dream a fiery breath of very God  
Had burned into his bosom? Was it strange?  
Then read the world's innumerable hearts—  
Yea, read your own, and match me if you  
can  
A heart like his—this lonely man of men!  
I ever knew him best; 'twas I that saw  
The truth eternal gleam like gem in jewel  
When he but talked to children: I perceived  
The deepening mystery and waxing wonder  
As swift, from strength to strength, he upward  
soared,

Upon the wings of his great spirit borne,  
While weak and weaker grew his earthly  
frame.

I knew the never-sleeping voice he heard  
That called to battle, and I shook to know  
More than the master's self could guess or  
see ;

For here all human hope of Heaven, housed  
Within a habitation perilous,  
And man's salvation, now within man's sight,  
Threatened through man's own frailty to fail !  
Measure ye that? Full sure the tortuous  
ways

Of dialectic deep that ye pursue,  
Should train your minds to this same  
subtlety

That made me fear. I thought he was a  
lamp—

A lamp incarnate, dazzled by the glare  
Of his own awful radiance and the blaze  
Of the supernal Godhead, Who had willed  
Descend upon this humble one ; I feared  
A load, too weighty for the Anakim,

Began to kill my Jesus. His poor flesh  
Sank underneath the strain ; he fainted oft  
And suffered through long secrecies ; he  
    wept ;  
He groaned in spirit with his Father hid ;  
Battled through many a midnight hour with  
    Fear,  
And gazed in terror at the front of Fate.  
He moved as one who shudders for his  
    thought,  
And cannot banish from his fearful eyes  
The haunting shadow that will peep and  
    peer.  
Stumbling in our mortality, too weak  
To tear it from him ; shrinking, flinching  
    yet  
From all the majesty and magnitude  
Of the high task, that echoed to his soul  
From the far corridors of earliest time,  
When Adam fell, he went his doubtful way.  
Still, still the master spake with Heaven's  
    voice,  
But was content to speak ; to act delayed.

And this I marked and girt my huge resolve  
To make him act and sweep him surely on  
To his epiphany.

WITH zeal at heat,  
Undaunted courage, and the purest faith  
That ever burned—an incense unto God ;  
Fired for my failing country ; torn with lust  
To do my Father's will, I strove to find  
Whether I might in all humility  
Essay the help that to his fellow-man  
Man giveth. Seeing, then, that Jesus knew  
Our common suffering and sadly bent  
Beneath the stern and universal yoke,  
I spake to him and bade him doff his  
flesh,  
As one doth doff a garment before toil.  
“Jesus of Nazareth, Thou Prince of Light,  
Leave prayers and fasting unto sons of men,  
Who know but how to pray and how to  
fast :  
Thou art the Son of God ! Thy Father now  
Bends His omnipotent and questioning eyes

From the lone height of Heaven to seek His  
Son.

He searcheth not beside the dusty knoll,  
Nor scorched highway, nor shadow of the  
stone,

Nor temple of red, jackal-haunted rocks  
Upon the desert sand. Not on the wave  
When fishers draw their nets through Galilee,  
Nor mid the shards and skeletons that  
show

Where cities stood to crown the vanished  
past,

His First Begotten shall the Godhead find ;  
Not synagogues reward the Almighty's search,  
Nor yet the Temple, where keen, vulpine  
eyes

Of them that hate Thee flash, and where the  
ears

Are pricked that would confound Thee in  
Thy speech.

A sword, my Master, Thou hast come to  
draw ;

Then bare it, and along that awful blade

Bring down the thunderbolt upon Thy foes  
And liberate the people of our God.  
Loose them and lift them up. Let them  
arise

Out of the dust rejoicing and be whole—  
A nation worth Thy kingship—yea, a race  
Whose humblest ones are fit to fill the  
thrones  
Of lesser kingdoms. O Thou Son of  
Heaven,

To rule and reign Thou com'st ! Thy Godly  
part

Is not to creep with mean humility  
Among the weary-footed. Thou dost bring  
Salvation to the stricken sons of Time,  
For all are lost without Thee. Harken then !  
Messiah is Messiah—He redeems  
The suffering of all the suffering earth ;  
But, Jesus, Thou dost suffer with the rest !  
A suffering Messiah ! 'Tis a wrong,  
And bitter slight to Heaven. Angels weep  
At Thine unseemly torments, for they know  
The Saviour comes to save and not to suffer.

Out of the night the enemy doth roar  
And hem the darkness in with flaming orbs,  
While Palestine, poor scape-goat of the world,  
Bleats for the trusted shepherd that she loved,  
And marvels that he hath deserted her.

From out their shattered and forgotten graves  
The saints and prophets lift a knell to  
Thee ;

And on the wide-wayed paths and plains of  
Heaven

Thine hosts await one archangelic word,  
To loose the hurricane of a million wings,  
If Thou but lift Thine eyes—those haunted  
eyes

That seek the sky no more, but home in  
dust ;

While on this hunger-starved and panting earth,  
The spirit of Judea, smouldering still  
In many a fruitful, patient one, shall leap  
Like fire to fire and lift an answering  
flame,

And light the everlasting legions here  
To David's City.



“ Jesus, Son of God,

All things in Heaven and earth and under  
earth—

The beings that we men have never seen,  
Who toil beyond our friendship in the  
womb

Of this great world; and they, the wingèd  
ones,

Who haunt the air, yet make their presence  
known

On hurtling wings that whistle in the  
night;

Monsters and demi-gorgons and the giants;  
And those 'twixt man and angel God hath  
made

For His own purposes to move and live  
Secluded from our sense—all, all cry out  
In muffled thunder through the universe,  
And lift their supplication at this hour  
To draw Thee to Thy throne!”

Even thus I spake;

Even thus I prayed with supplicating hands  
And voice of inspiration. He heard all,

But answered with the lash of cold rebuke,  
And bade me hide myself, nor meet his  
gaze

Until my knees were weary of the earth.  
Doth fealty, then, demand unthinking suit  
Such as our dogs have power to render us?  
I thought not so, and smarted when he  
chode,

Setting his wrath to human frailty,  
That kindled into anger at the truth  
Upon my tongue. Yet me he did not daunt:  
I yielded not, nor mourned my earnest words,  
Since they were winged with love of God and  
Man,

But felt the more affirmed to urge him on  
And onward. Yea, I studied deeper yet  
How best to point the road that he must  
go,

Since, man to man, I stronger felt than he  
And mightier to hold the Light aloft,  
Had I been chosen for the cresset-head.  
Then, after prayer and fast and lonely hours,  
As deep and secret as the master's own,

There flashed upon my hardy soul from  
God—

From God I fondly dreamed—the dreadful  
deed

That doth confound me now.

EVEN thus I wrought :

When round the Passover had come again

And to Jerusalem he set his face,

I learned your conclave sat in secrecy

And pondered still how best to overthrow

The man the people loved. Then hastened I

From Bethany and, with a stroke of guile

Deeper than yours, declared how I might  
give

Jesus into your hands at dead of night,

When all the city slept. I feigned to sell

The man I thought was God ; and glad were  
ye,

Haggling like hucksters in the mart of flesh,

To buy a prophet's blood for yonder trash

That blights the mottled marble of the floor.

Then there awoke the spirit we call Chance,

To fool and fortify me at a breath ;  
For clear unto my busy brain it seemed  
That Jesus knew full well the thing I did,  
And when this night in upper room we sat  
At meat together, twice he smiled on me,  
And I discerned approval in his eyes.  
“Do quickly what thou doest.” Thus he  
spake ;  
And I went forth into the deep blue night,  
Ere yet the wonder of the lesser stars  
Was dimmed before the moon. In hungry  
joy  
I ran to help the Son of God ; I came  
And planned with ye to lead your servants  
forth  
Through the still olive gardens of that glade  
Where best he loved to pray.  
It was ordained  
Where I should meet your people, where the  
rout  
And soldiers and centurion should bide  
To wait me. Then with soul translated high,  
Ecstatic, fleet of foot, along I went

Through moonlit paths of the night-hidden  
Mount,

That I might see if all were well with him.  
Because he knew, indeed, that this still hour  
Was great with his great destiny ; he knew  
The orb and sceptre of all earth were set  
Unto his blessed hand. Thus ran my thought,  
And, hid behind an ancient bole, I saw,  
In battle with the ever-living God,  
My master all alone.

How small he looked—  
How small and shrunk and desolate ! The  
sight  
My own high spirit quenched and chilled my  
heart.

THOU knowest, O priests, how all our  
rolling hills  
Are clothed in misty green and flashing fires  
That twinkle when the winds but touch the  
woods,  
Where in her legions doth the olive stand.  
There is a glittering of silver light

Within them, and wine-purple shadows rove  
Upon their billowing breasts. They are the  
garb

And deathless vesture of our aged hills ;  
They robe each undulation, knap, and knoll ;  
And oft their name upon the sacred page  
Of God's own message lies. In Spring they  
scent

The air with myriad blossoms, and the joy  
Of all their new-born leaves doth roll along—  
A cloud of radiant silver o'er the Mount.  
And later, ere the precious seed-time comes,  
And harvest-fields grow white, and skin of  
grape

Thins underneath the lustre of the bloom,  
Their berries turn to ripeness, till each tree  
Doth show her diadem of starry leaves  
All gemmed with purple. And our God hath  
said

That we shall strike them not a second time  
And clamber not again amid the boughs,  
To shower their treasure on the sheet out-  
spread,

But leave good measure of His gracious gift  
For fatherless and widows, and for them  
Who seek as strangers for our comforting.  
A symbol thus of charity she stands ;  
And so did Jesus seek her, for he read  
Pure love into her loveliness ; he found  
That fragrant peace and silence made their  
homes

Amid her secret places. Them he sought ;  
And now I watched, the while he sought in  
vain.

'Tis an abode of eld, where Time's own self  
May be surprised asleep, and primal things  
Brood near, unseen but felt ; the mystery  
Of peace stupendous, of a peace beyond  
The gentlest whisper of a tongue to tell  
Doth shroud this place ; and here, upon the  
earth,

He knelt in torment. Round about his feet  
The blood-red wind-flowers blew, their colour  
sucked

Away by the white moon, and through the  
bough

Low stars flashed largely from a fret of  
leaves

Where dim, innumerable olives dreamed  
Like smoke of myrrh and storax.

Hast thou heard  
Old olive trees that murmur in the night?  
Dost know the bated hush they keep? Hast  
seen

The moon cast down at foot of every tree  
A shadow, like an ebon garment dropped  
From each time-foundered trunk? All stunted,  
gnarled,

They huddled round about him where he  
knelt,

And made a cincture of their aged limbs  
Above his secret agonies, as though  
The venerable, grey ambassadors  
Were pilgrims from another world than ours,  
Where trees are conscious creatures. Ears  
had they

And eyes: they heard and saw. In dismal  
trance

Above his dolour, all the ambient air



Was sunk and held its sorrowful breath  
    awhile,

Afraid to whisper. Interlacing boughs  
By chance upon his lonely place of prayer  
The shadow of a Roman cross threw down  
Along the dew-white grasses ; and he saw  
And swiftly marked the filthy symbol flung  
Into that anguished hour. The moon shone  
    full

Upon his harrowed forehead, and I stared  
To see his years had doubled in an  
    hour.

His burning, tearless eyes were lifted up  
To mirror all the woe of all the world,  
And blazing agony burned on his brow  
Like a red flame ; he writhed and flung him  
    down

With face against the earth ; and his dire  
    load

Of torn and tortured clay upon this rack  
Seemed like to perish ere he cast it off.  
He fought, the soul embattled 'gainst the  
    flesh ;

And still most steadfastly I watched with  
faith,

Believing in my heart that he was God.

Yet did I weep, for well I loved the man

And would have succoured him in that dark  
hour,

But that I knew the battle now he waged

Might not be shared. I mourned his awful  
grief;

And then to joy arose, and scarce could  
hide

For longing to give praise. I watched and  
saw

The Godhead conquer! After bitter stress

He lifted up his head, destroyed the peace,

And thrilled the listening forest with a  
prayer.

Aloud he wailed, and through the nightly  
aisles

Of all that sylvan gloom his piteous voice

Like a lost spirit thrid. And thus he  
cried:

"Father! if it be possible, this cup

Remove from me." Whereon the silence  
crept

Close, like a presence; for not only he  
But all earth listened, and that planet old  
We call the moon, while in the upper air  
Of widest welkin, not a single star  
But ceased its throb to hear the Father's  
voice

Ring through high Heaven.

Now his haunted eyes  
My master closed and waited patiently  
If peradventure should an angel fly  
With answer to his prayer. But all was still,  
And since none came, a deep and doleful  
breath

Shook him where still he knelt—a racking  
sigh

That menaced his worn life and weary heart.  
Again he spake, and in a voice resigned  
Yielded his manhood and assumed the God.

"Not as I will, my Father, but as Thou  
Shalt will, so be it!" Then I knelt me  
down

Even as Jesus rose, all imminent,  
And shone and towered above himself, as  
though

Some cloud celestial he had been, that crowns  
The heights of earth and lifts, itself a world,  
To take the glory of the noonday sun  
Upon its many mounting crests and domes,  
And golden gleaming pinnacles. So he  
Now stood transfigured, mighty, motionless,  
His eyes uplifted upon Heaven's gate  
To see the portals swing! And to my sense,  
Enthralled by this full moment, now it  
seemed

The entranced night awakened at his word  
And burst its long suspension—budded,  
bloomed

In scent and song and joyful murmurings  
Through every dusky dene and solemn depth  
Of all those woodland ways. For nigh at  
hand,

Within a myrtle thicket by the path,  
That hither led, where the sweet mastic grows  
And fragrant, hoary herbs defy the sun,

The liquid music of a little bird  
Now sudden tinkled forth melodiously.  
A hidden bul-bul had begun to sing  
In dreams upon his perch, then waked himself  
And poured from out that dewy dingle dark  
A hymn of praise; so that the bird and I  
Were first of the world's creatures to proclaim  
The Son of God. Then round about there  
sprang

Great candid lilies from adoring earth,  
That lifted all their silver censers sweet  
About his dusty knees. Aloft there hung,  
In ordered legions round the pascal moon,  
A gathering fret and panoply of clouds,  
That from their woven woof and web of pearl  
About the orb, in one translucent cirque,  
Cast a dim rainbow. Then they broke and  
massed

Until the sky, to my transported sense,  
Began to be alive with rushing wings  
And swift, star-pointed lances. Knowing then  
The time was come, I tore me from my  
place,

To speed where the impatient torches flashed  
And men cried out for Judas.

LIKE a snake,  
With rufous scales and smoking breath, we crept  
Winding along the Mount. The patient trees  
Took on our sanguine livery one by one ;  
The owlet fled into the virgin dark  
Before our riot. Scattered we the dew  
From off the grasses, bruised the sleeping  
    flowers,  
And frightened things unseen in holt and den ;  
We threaded still Gethsemane with fire  
And stench and sooty smoke, that rolled aloft  
Above the mail-clad men, till all the earth  
Was fouled and violated ere we came  
To his inviolate place. But I before  
The mob so swiftly flew, they bade me stay,  
Nor overrun their rabble. On we fared  
Until we came where Jesus waited us,  
Surrounded by those others who had slept  
The while he suffered. Him I straightway  
    kissed

And dreamed I signalled God! Ye know the  
rest.

No Father smiled on that deserted son;  
No fiery-footed cherubim swept down  
To smite his foes; no peal celestial shook  
The grave of night to set the dayspring free;  
No heavenly beam, from that high place  
above

The sun, shone out to dazzle earth. Instead  
A lonely, broken, and deserted man  
They haled among them to the judgment-  
seat.

PRIESTS, I have sinned a thousand ways in  
this.

Most precious, innocent blood is ceded up—  
Most precious and most innocent and pure.  
A spirit of unbounded worth is he  
And high benignant purpose: not our God,  
But ranged along with God, and yearning deep  
To soothe the earth's wide, mordant miseries

So far as one man may. And if he go  
To the Roman beam, then it is I alone  
That murder him and slay my only friend.  
Oh, suffer no such everlasting curse  
To fasten on my soul! Be patient, Scribes,  
For if this man is mad, then by how much  
More mad am I, who dared to think myself  
Subtler than God? Here standeth one who  
toiled

To guide the Everlasting and direct  
His proper path! What man run lunatic  
Dreamed folly fearfuller?

Know ye remorse?

Ye cannot, for this Jesus ye would slay  
Was first to find it. His concept of sin,  
So dreadful, new, and pregnant, gave it birth;  
Out of his lofty soul the demon came—  
A foul thing from a fair; a pestilence;  
An evil exhalation given forth  
By corpse of perished deed; a death in life;  
A doom, a mortal poison that doth clog  
The very springs of action. From the past—  
The all-accomplished past—it crawl<sup>1</sup>eth back



To rend the living present from our hands ;  
It leapeth down upon the helmsman, Hope,  
Who steers each labouring barque of human  
    life,

And fastens on him, tiger-wise and fanged,  
Until the tiller's free, the vessel wrecked.

It gnaws the lust of living from the heart,  
Endeavour slays, emasculates the will ;

It broods and breeds and festers, till that  
    man,

Noble of heart enough to feel its power,  
Carries a hideous load of gangrened soul  
While yet his flesh is firm ; and thus he  
    moves

Amid the pinnacles of agony

That only spirits know, and shrieks aloud

His sleepless sin. Have I not often seen

Its ravages within those trusting hearts

That went along with him ? Aye, that I have,

And marvelled how he held the dreadful  
    power

With gentlest words to kill a bounding hope,

Or bring a hale and happy human soul,

All joy, with life on tiptoe, down to this  
Infernal depth and fling it suddenly  
Writhing and maimed upon the shards of sin,  
Like a cut worm. And here stand I  
destroyed

By this unspeakable and deadly bane ;  
For though my purpose aimed as high as  
Heaven,

Its overthrow now flings me to the deep,  
With those accursèd who betray their trust  
And earn remorse : Hell's masterpiece. My  
heart

Doth hold Gehenna—length and breadth and  
verge ;

Its least and mightiest torments hide within  
This single bosom, where but yesternight  
Homed all the bliss of Heaven ; and I  
stand

Suppliant for death—the death ye measure  
him.

Tormented am I to the raging core  
Of my dark soul—all dazed and terrified,  
Like to an over-driven beast, that glares

And foams with thirst and pleads wild-eyed  
for peace.

I loved him, loved him with most passionate  
love ;

And that same love, now fallen on such bale,  
By the Almighty's dread decree, doth bring  
My toll of days in helpless, hopeless gloom  
To death inexorable.

Dead indeed

Unto this world am I—wakened from dreams  
Of Zion's far-flung glory to a morn  
Most desolately dark. My country's good,  
Her welfare and her triumph ultimate  
Still lie within Jehovah's council hid.  
'Tis not for me : 'tis never now for me  
To run beside the chariot-wheel of God—  
And that's a grief to slay a heart like  
mine,

Fed on the manna of the promises  
He breathed ; but worse is here of agony,  
Most personal, particular, and close.

I loved the man, I say, and still love on,  
Albeit the God was but a god-like dream.

And what remains? The man that dreamed  
so well

Lies in your power, a jest for Roman slaves,  
Who spit upon him by the guard-room fire,  
Fling purple on his shoulders, thrust a reed  
Within his patient hand and bid him tell  
Their cursèd names that smote him. His  
great soul

Ye cannot mar, but mine ye must pollute  
Beyond all strength but the Eternal's own  
To cleanse, if ye shall crucify that man.  
O Caiaphas, doth yet thy breast-plate hide  
A heart beneath its twelve-fold splendour  
bright?

Then strive to feel therein what now I  
feel,

And pity me in truth by pitying him,  
Who at the Everlasting's whisper dark,  
And secret will, by us not understood,  
Was driven to declare himself Messiah.  
Is that which we call madness also sin?  
Then half the world we pity, we should  
damn.

The mad are God's own mouthpiece ; wouldst  
thou dare

Thus to destroy the chosen of the Lord ?

What sin dost find in him ? His gentle wits

Run over into this, and who is hurt ?

Granted his word was vain ; yet all his acts

Who live, that love their neighbour as  
themselves,

Can less than praise and honour ? He but  
taught

That God is love ; then let that love of  
loves

Cast out the fear for evermore ye preach ;

Oh ! let him mercy have, who mercy brought—

A gift from Heaven to the merciless.

Are ye akin to that unthinking herd

Who will cry "Crucify !" when day is come,

Because their promised God is but a man ?

Do ye, too, seek to feed your priestly hate

On innocence ? Nay, take the guilty one

Who well hath earned the worst that ye can  
do.

'Tis I that should be crucified ; 'tis I

That planned and plotted to confound your  
craft

And cast you down to night; 'tis I that  
strove,

With all my passionate, unsleeping strength,  
Upon your ruined synagogues to found  
A Temple where no priests shall minister  
Or cast their shadows between God and man!  
Take me and let him go. What sin is his?  
What table hath he spread for hungry men  
Ye could not sup at? Search the Thora  
through,

Ye shall not find a law to slay this man;  
And that done, seek again within yourselves,  
Where sit the heavenly arbiters, and hear  
What saith the still small voice that, like a  
bell,

Strikes in the holy places of man's heart.  
'Twill bid you pardon him and let him go  
In peace away.

Oh! ye that hold the power,  
Wield it but gently o'er this innocent head,  
Whose only thought was rescue of mankind.

The man is young ; his universal love  
Hath burnt him up. Enthusiasm deep,  
With a fierce aura of divine desire,  
Doth quite consume him, even while he  
          strives

By its celestial light to find his way,  
And still existeth, sick almost to death.  
Then let him pass in peace, where he hath  
          fought

And loved and striven, flinging forth his days  
Like rainbows through the gloom of Palestine,  
Till all are spent. Leave ye the man to God,  
And suffer me to die for him.

                                Your heads

Ye shake against me. Ye resign and doom  
This sad, unspotted fool of highest Heaven  
To Golgotha? Then heed a dying tongue  
That tolls on life's last threshold and shall  
          sound

Never again for shadow-casting men.  
May every piece of that foul silver there  
Sparkling, as Satan's eyes beneath the Tree  
Of Knowledge in the garden—may each one,

All wet with Jesus' blood, go breed in hell  
As money never bred on earth. May each  
Beget a million dagger-pointed flames  
To scorch and blister in your deathless flesh ;  
May all the art of fiends devise such grief  
As ruined souls have never known, till ye  
Sink to the lowest vault and torture-house  
Gehenna holds. Your cursèd hearts are stone,  
But in the fury of the nether fires  
They'll crack at last, and tear your bosoms  
out,

And leave you empty for the undying worm  
To fret and gnaw through all eternity.  
'Tis I that must be damned upon this earth  
While my betrayal lives in memory  
Misunderstood of ages ; yet an hour  
Doth lie in time when the Eternal Hand  
Shall seal forgiveness. Now I go my way,  
To quit me of this dust men Judas call,  
And take my lowly, penitential place  
Before the portal of that secret State,  
Where ghosts of men abide the will of God.  
Thither I hasten, that when Jesus comes,



The foremost of all spirits waiting him,  
With forehead on the earth, the Iscariot kneels.  
So shall he, reading in the bloody book  
Of my sore, wounded soul, lift up his voice  
And pardon——

*(Judas goes out. Caiaphas and the rest rise. There is a great expiration of breath and rustle of garments. Clear cold light has filled the sky, and the stars are no more seen. Jerusalem lies black against the whiteness of the dawn.)*

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